

“Information about Agostino Rao, who came to America from Polistena, Italy, in 1909”

By: Carla Welsh (nee Seitz),
the great-granddaughter of Agostino Rao



Photo of Agostino Rao.

Name: Agostino Rao.

Alias: Augustine Ross. From about 1920-1939, Agostino changed his name to “Augustine Ross.” Then he changed his name back to “Agostino Rao.”

Birth: 6 FEB 1890, Polistena, Reggio di Calabria, Calabria, Italy.

Agostino’s Parents: Francesco Rao and Teresa Caldarazzo. Francesco was born 14 NOV 1857, and Teresa was born 6 FEB 1858. They were both born in Polistena. They got married in 1884 in Polistena. I do not know their death dates.

Agostino’s Paternal Grandparents: Agostino Rao and Caterina Tripodi. Agostino was born circa 1819, and Caterina was born JUN 1825, in Polistena.

Agostino’s Maternal Grandparents: Domenico Angelo Giuseppe Caldarazzo and Carmela Maria Melitano. Domenico was born 26 NOV 1820 in Polistena, and died 25 JUL 1886 in Polistena. Carmela was born about 1836.

Agostino’s Great-Grandparents:

1. Michelangelo Rao and ____.
2. Michelangelo Tripodi and Maria Giovanna Fusco (married: 15 DEC 1816, Polistena).
3. Domenico Caldarazzo (born: circa 1795, died: 5 SEP 1820, Polistena) and Teresa Maria Gallucio/Galluzzo (born: circa 1801). They married 22 DEC 1816 in Polistena.

Agostino’s 2nd Great-Grandparents:

1. Francesco Tripodi and Caterina Caliopetro (Caterina died 16 JAN 1820, in Polistena).
2. Antonino Fusco and Antonia Marafioti.
3. Vincenzo Caldarazzo and Costanza Longardo (Costanza was born: circa 1762, died: 18 DEC 1837, in Polistena).
4. Domenico Gallucio/Galluzzo and Elisabetta Luccisano.

Agostino’s 3rd Great-Grandparents:

1. Antonio Caliopetro and Antonia Fidale.
2. Francesco Giacomo Longardo and Antonina Lunsano.

Agostino’s Siblings: (all were born in Polistena, Reggio di Calabria, Calabria, Italy)

1. Caterina Rao (born: 23 JUN 1885, died: 28 OCT 1886).
2. Concetta Rao (born: 4 DEC 1886).
3. Rosaria Assunta Rao (born: 2 JUL 1888, died: 21 APR 1956).
4. Grazia Rao (a nun in Italy, born: 8 MAR 1892).
5. Maria Carmela Rao (born: 4 DEC 1893, died: 11 MAR 1895).
6. Maria Carmela Rao (born: 11 MAY 1896, Polistena, died: 31 OCT 1969, died in Torino, Italy).
7. Saverio Rao (born: 19 JUN 1898, died: 11 DEC 1987).
8. Guiseppe “Joe” Rao (born 1900).
9. Vincenzo Rao (born 1902).

Agostino’s Uncle: Agostino’s mother’s brother was Nicola Guiseppe Caldarazzo. He went by “Giuseppe/Joe.” He was born 11 JUL 1875, Polistena, Reggio di Calabria, Calabria, Italy. He came to America around 1899, and changed his name to Joseph Nicholas Calderazzo. In America, he lived on North Portland Avenue, Brooklyn, Kings County, New York. He was the contact person Agostino used when he arrived in America in 1909 (Uncle Giuseppe Caldarazzo of North Portland Avenue, Brooklyn, NY, is noted on Agostino’s 1909 Passenger List). Joe married Maria Caia, and they had 10 kids together. Joe died in 1968 and is buried in Holy Cross Cemetery, Brooklyn, Kings County, New York. My mom told me Agostino went to Brooklyn to visit relatives every now and then. She thought they may have

owned a shoe company? I do know Agostino used to make his own shoes, and I have his shoe fitters, needles, and thread. I have an ID card from Jaycee Footwear Company in Brooklyn, NY, that has Agostino's name on it, so I'm not sure if the family owned that company, or if it was just a random company Agostino worked for at one time.

DNA NOTE: I was able to verify the above mentioned birthdates, marriages, death dates, and names of Agostino's siblings, his uncle, parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, 2nd great-grandparents, and on, etc., per documentation scanned to Antenati, and per DNA, and it concurs with personal family records/documentation passed down. I have several DNA matches to people who tested with Ancestry, that I connect back to on all these lines, which allowed me to trace back to the level of my 6th great-grandparents.

Agostino's Arrival to America: 29 MAR 1909. Port of Entry: New York, New York, aboard the vessel "Indiana." On the second page of the passenger list, it states Agostino is going to stay with his Uncle Giuseppe Caldarazzo of North Portland Avenue, Brooklyn, New York.

1910 US Census: not found. His name is probably indexed/spelled wrong.

Agostino's Marriage: to Virginia Olah, on 29 JUN 1914, Scarbro, Fayette County, West Virginia, USA. Virginia's real name was Verona. She also went by Veronika or Veronka. She was born in Hungary; the daughter of John and Julia Olah. I only remember very little of Virginia, because she died when I was just about 3 years old. She was very short, about 4 feet 9 inches.

Children: Agostino and Virginia had 7 children. Their only surviving child was my grandmother, named Teresa Conley Rao (aka Teresa Conley Ross), who was their first born child. Teresa was born 11 JUN 1915, Stotesbury, Raleigh County, West Virginia. All the other children died before age 1 due to Rh Disease. They were known as "blue babies." I do know one baby was Angeline Ross, and two babies were both named Frank Ross. Angeline died 21 JUL 1925 in Beckley, Raleigh, West Virginia, aged 9 months and 3 days old. Frank died 25 AUG 1924 in Beckley, Raleigh, West Virginia, aged 8 months and 25 days old. Teresa went on to marry Antonino/Antonio "Tony" Vincenzo Mallamas, the son of Paolo Mallamaci (aka Paul Mallamas) and Evelyn Pavilie (aka Evelyn Paul).

1920 US Census: Agostino (name listed as Augustine Ross), wife Virginia, and daughter Teresa live on Holton Avenue, Cleveland, Cuyahoga, Ohio, USA. Two boarders live with them.

Date of Naturalization: 5 DEC 1921, Circuit Court of Raleigh County, West Virginia, USA.

1930 US Census: Agostino (name listed as Andrew Ross), wife Virginia, and daughter Teresa live on Sullivan Road, Raleigh County, West Virginia, USA. A lodger lives with them.

1940 US Census: Agostino (name spelled as Augusterio Ras/Rao) and wife Virginia live at 106 Beverley Street, Raleigh County, West Virginia, USA. Agostino moved to Chester, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, a year or so after this census was taken. He later moved to 939 Lawnton Terrace, Glenolden, Delaware County, Pennsylvania. I can't remember the whole story, but Agostino and his wife Virginia separated. I think their daughter Teresa's husband Tony Mallamas bought Agostino the house at 939 Lawnton Terrace.

Occupations in America: Agostino worked as an inspector for a hardware company for a few years when he lived in Ohio; blacksmith and tool maker in the coal mines of West Virginia; owned a nightclub/roadhouse named "Ross Night Club" in West Virginia; worked for Jaycee Footwear in Brooklyn, New York; worked for Sun Shipbuilding & Dry Dock Company in Chester, Delaware County, Pennsylvania; and worked for General Steel Industries, which is where he retired from.

Illegal Activity: Agostino owned an illegal moonshine operation during Prohibition that was busted by the Feds, but he never got caught. He hid and watched the Feds take the whole thing apart. In the 1930s,

Agostino owned "Ross Night Club." The night club/roadhouse was located where Beckley Newspapers stands today at 801 North Kanawha Street, Beckley, West Virginia, USA. The concrete wall which stood across the street from the club still stands today. In 1935, at 4:00 in the morning, at Agostino's nightclub, 4 men "mobbed" Agostino, so he shot the one guy in the leg. I found several newspaper articles about it in the Beckley, West Virginia, area newspapers. After Agostino sold the club, I believe it became "The Idle Hour Club" and was busted as a "house of ill fame" aka a brothel/house of prostitution.

Death: 27 FEB 1968, Taylor Hospital, Ridley Park, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, USA.

Burial: Arlington Cemetery, Drexel Hill, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, USA. He and wife Virginia/Verona/Veronka/Veronika are buried together. Their headstone is engraved: RAO. Agostino 1890-1968. Veronika 1895-1981.

Agostino Rao's Cause of Death, as written by my mother, Veronica "Vicki" Antoinette Dobson Seitz (nee Mallamas). Vicki is Agostino's granddaughter:

"Agostino Rao loved his whiskey. He would get up in the morning and start his days off with cigarettes, whiskey, and coffee, and only ate one big meal a day. Later on in life, he was diagnosed with stomach cancer, which never killed him. He hemorrhaged and they gave him medication, but the medicine made him feel worse, so he threw it out, and took up cigs and whiskey again and stayed on that until he died. He got hit by a car 10 years later, but he refused to go to the hospital. 2 weeks later, he fell out his door, slammed his head on the steps, and stayed in a coma until he died. The cancer never got him. It was thought he may have had a slow brain bleed from the car accident that made him fall, but it is unknown. He was a very thin man, thin as a rail, but he loved to get dressed up in his fedora, his diamond stickpin, and watch!"

The "ghost story" passed down by my mother to me:

Another story my mom told me, was that of a "ghost" story in the coal camps of West Virginia. My mom wrote, "Agostino Rao and Veronka/Virginia Olah, my grandparents, were living in a coal camp house in West Virginia. Poppy was a miner at that time or a blacksmith shoeing all horses and such. Veronka took my mother, Teresa, and they walked to the local camp store. When they got home, all the kitchen cabinets were pulled open and all the food was laying in the middle of the kitchen floor all in a big stirred up mess. Sugar, salt, everything. She told Poppy she thought somebody came in while she was gone and vandalized the place! Of course they were mad. The next time she went to the camp store and came home, everything was in the middle of the floor again! Now Poppy was really mad. He decided to sit outside the next time Veronka and Teresa went to the store, and watch the house the whole time from a hidden area. He didn't see anyone! So in the house they went, and low and behold, all the food was on the floor, all the cabinets open. Another big mess! They both thought the house was haunted by a ghost. Nowadays, we call them poltergeists, but they didn't know that word back then. It was a ghost to them. Poppy said to pack up everything, which I doubt was much, and he said we are not spending another night in this house. And that's what they did! Took up residence in another coal camp house that night! I'll bet those coal camp homes were only a little better than a shack, but they did come with a coal stove."

The story about Agostino's daughter Teresa wanting to marry Tony Mallamas, and guns were almost "a-blazing:"

When Agostino's daughter Teresa met Tony Mallamas, Agostino did not want them together. My mom wrote, "Tony and Teresa ran off to Charleston, West Virginia, to get married. Her father, Agostino Rao, found out and since he didn't like Tony, he did all in his power to prevent it. So he quick went to Charleston and found Teresa sitting in the car outside the courthouse. Tony was inside making preparations. When he came outside, he couldn't find Teresa. He asked some people if they saw where she went. A man said, "Yes, I saw her. A man grabbed her and threw her over his shoulder (my mom was tiny) and hauled her away." My father knew that had to be Agostino. Later that day, Agostino went to Tony's father's house to confront Tony. He carried his shotgun. Tony's father, Paolo Mallamaci (aka Paul Mallamas), along with Tony, came out on the porch. He was armed with his shotgun. Agostino was mad and said he was going to kill Tony with his shotgun. Paolo said, "You do that, and I'm going to shoot you. You will be the next one dead!" So, it was a standoff. They talked a bit and made the decision that if Tony would wait a year until Teresa turned 21, Agostino would not interfere, and nobody had to die. So, that's what they did. Teresa turned 21 on June 11, 1936, and they married on August 15, 1936, at St. Michael's Greek Catholic Church. My immigrant grandparents settled things in their own way, God bless them all."



Agostino, Virginia, daughter Teresa, and baby Frank.



Passport Photo: Agostino Rao and daughter Teresa, circa 1924. Trip to Italy to visit Family.



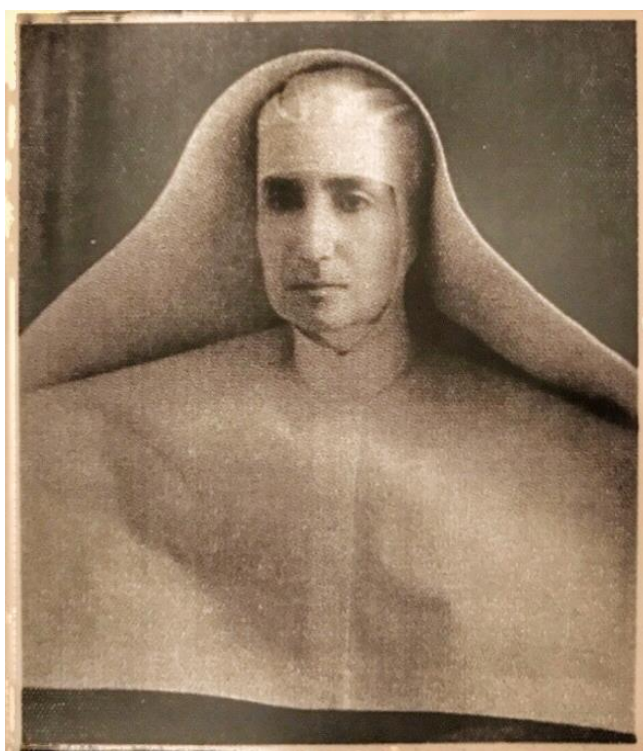
Agostino's daughter Teresa and husband Tony Mallamas.



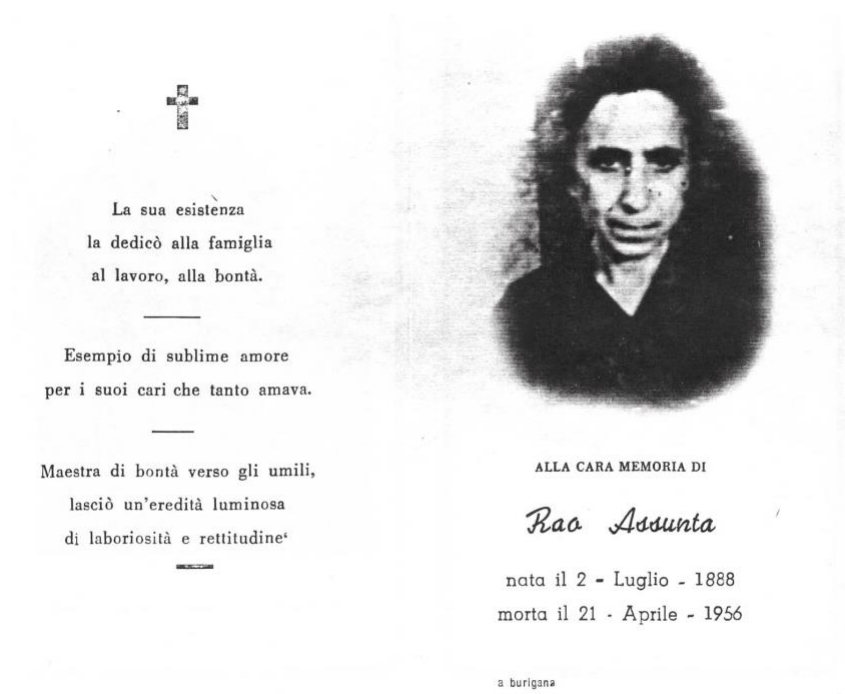
This is Agostino's uncle, Nicola Giuseppe Caldarazzo aka Joseph "Joe" Nicholas Calderazzo (1875-1968). Came to America around 1899. Lived in Brooklyn, New York, USA.



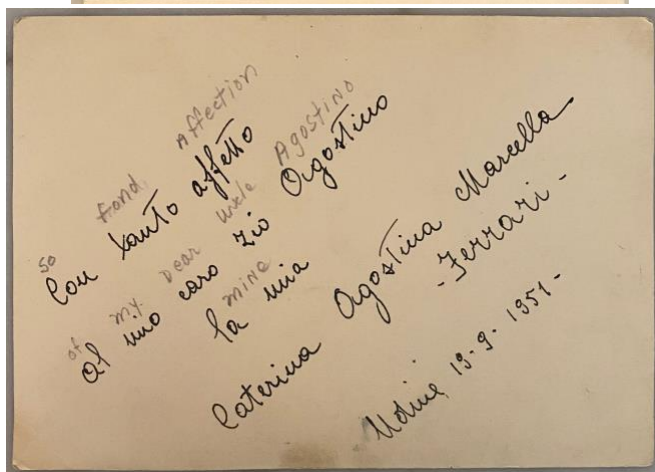
Agostino's brother, Giuseppe "Joe" Rao.



Agostino's sister, Grazia Rao, a nun in Italy.



Agostino's sister, Rosaria Assunta Rao. This is her funeral prayer card.

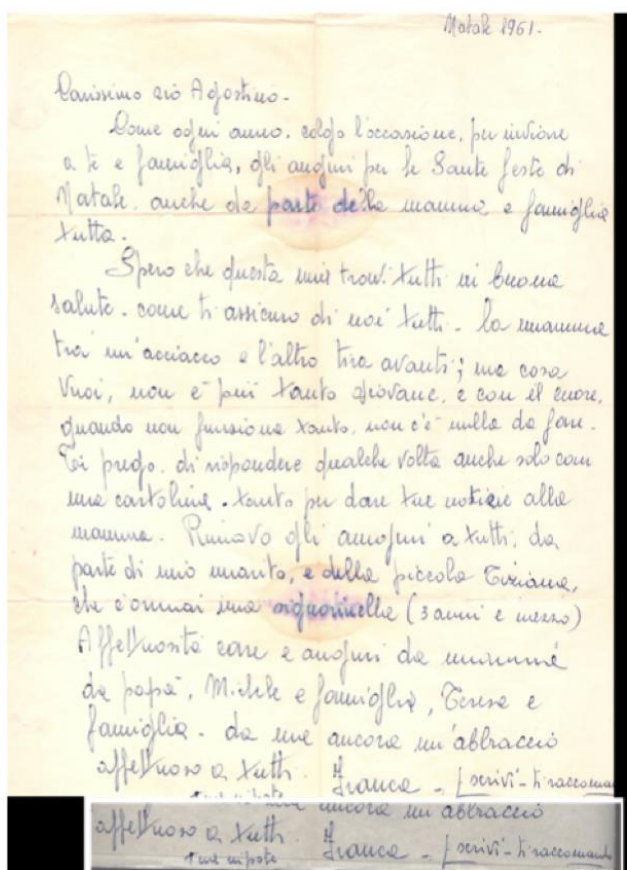


Front and back of photo of Caterina Agostina Marcella Ferrari, of Udine, Italy, 1951. This is Agostino's niece's daughter. The handwriting on the back of this photo matches a letter I have that Agostino's niece Franca Berno wrote to him from when she lived in Torino, Italy, in 1961. So, I think this little girl is the daughter of Franca? If not, then this little girl is the daughter of one of Agostino's other nieces.

The following letter was written by Franca Berno, who is Agostino's niece. I am not totally sure which one of Agostino's siblings is her mom, but I think his sister Maria Carmela Rao may be her mom, since she died in Torino, Italy.

LETTER TRANSLATION:

The following letter was mailed to Agostino Rao in 1961 from his niece, Franca Berno, of Via Cagliari, Torino (Turin), Italy, building number 20. Agostino Rao lived at 351 Franklin Street, Chester, Delaware County, PA, USA. The letter confirms that Franca's mom is Agostino's sister. Franca mentions a 3 ½ year old girl named Tiziana who is probably Franca's daughter, so Tiziana would have been born 1958 in Italy. The letter also mentions "Michele's family" and "Teresa's family."



Translation:

Dear Uncle Agostino,

Like every year, I take this opportunity to post best wishes to you and your family for the holy holidays of Christmas, even from mom and family all. I hope this mine finds everyone in good spirits, cheers, as I assure you of all of us. Mom between one ailment and another he keeps going; but what you want, he is no longer so young and with a heart as it does not work much, there is nothing to do. Please answer sometimes even just with a postcard, just to give you news to mom. Once again, best wishes to everyone from part of my husband and little Tiziana, who is now a young lady (3 and a half years old). Dear affection and best wishes from mom and from dad, Michele and family, Teresa and family, another hug from me affectionate to all.

Franca

write I recommend your niece